

HOW TO DO RESEARCH

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THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: WHAT WE WANT TO AVOID

“Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.”

Samuel Johnson

RESEARCH

- **From the French “recercher”**
 - to travel through or survey
- **Careful, systematic, patient study & investigation in some field of knowledge**
- **Undertaken for the purpose of discovering or establishing facts or principles**

DECIDING ON A PURPOSE

- **What do I intend to do in this paper?**
 - **Describe and analyze how something is done?**
 - **Discover what happened at a particular time and place?**
 - **Understand and explain a concept?**
 - **Marshall evidence to persuade others on a particular point of view?**

DECIDING ON A TOPIC

- **Let the ideas percolate for awhile. . .**
 - **See what sticks, what you keep going back to**
- **What am I most interested in?**
- **Do I want to know a lot about a little or a little about a lot?**
- **Narrower papers are easier, broader ones more difficult**

DECIDING ON A TOPIC

- **On what topic do I wish to do a paper?**
 - What is the subject or thrust of my research?
 - How many elements are there to this topic?
 - Can I make it more focused, more specific?
- **What do I NOT want to investigate?**
 - What are the boundaries of the topic?
 - How do I decide to include and exclude certain aspects?

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- **All data is equal unless you discriminate among it with questions**
- **Cannot find an answer without a question**
- **Asking the right question is critical to doing good research**
- **Need to refine the relevant questions and focus on the most important one(s)**
- **The question is the focus of research**

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?

- **Figure half the time is for research**
- **The other half is for writing--and rewriting**
- **How much time can you devote to it?**
 - **In what increments?**
 - **Over what period?**
- **Exert control over the material**
 - **If you don't set a time frame for research and writing, you will read and write endlessly**

THINK ABOUT THE TOPIC

- List all your potential working titles
- List the elements involved in assessing this subject
- Cluster the elements and different aspects of the subject
- Outline the topic to give it some form
- Is the shape that is emerging what you want or need?

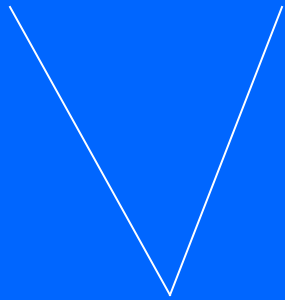
SELECT A GOOD WORKING TITLE

- The title should state the focus of the inquiry
- It should show the boundaries of the topic
- Incorporate the main purpose and the topic
- Eliminate extraneous concerns
- If lucky, it can be clever and catchy, memorable

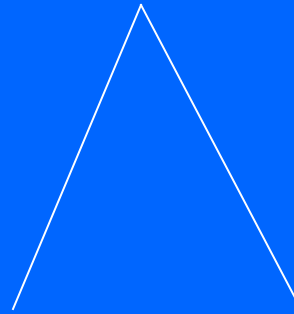
IMPOSE LOGIC ON CHAOS

- **Organize the elements into a logical approach of some kind --**
 - **Inductive (specific to general)**
 - **Deductive (general to specific)**
 - **Chronological (time sequence)**
 - **Forward--Backward--Mix**
 - **Overview (assess all parts of a debate, dispute)**
 - **Problem statement, assessment and recommendation**

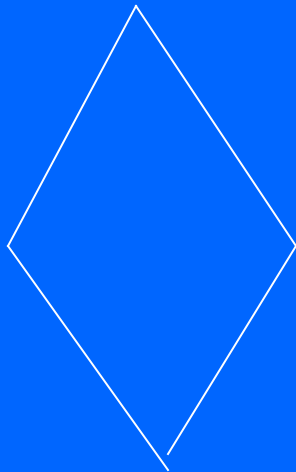
Diagrams of Logic Flow



Funnel



**Inverted
Funnel**



Diamond



Hour Glass

IMPOSE LOGIC ON CHAOS

- **Clarity and transparency work best--**
 - **Can be clear to you, not to your reader**
- **Leave lots of blank spaces around clusters or outline for later comments**
- **Be flexible**
 - **You have a direction, but you don't know what you will find along the way**
- **Write down everything you think of about the topic**

TURN YOUR RESEARCH NOTES INTO PRECISE QUESTIONS

- **What do you need to know?**
- **What specific questions must be answered to write this paper?**
- **What--specifically--do you need to find out to do this? Where can you find it?**
- **If you don't need it for the paper, don't use it in the paper!**

WHAT KIND OF ANSWERS DO YOU NEED?

- **Anecdotal information?**
- **Historical background?**
- **Statistical data?**
- **Corroboration from multiple sources?**
- **How much data do you need?**
- **What kind of authority is required?**
- **How up to date must information be?**

DO ANSWERS NEED TO COME FROM PRIMARY OR SECONDARY COURCES?

- **Primary sources are special because they have**
 - **Reliability**
 - **Timeliness**
 - **Real world relevance to then**
- **Secondary sources are**
 - **Interpretations by others**
 - **Both more general and more focused**

PLAGIARISM

- Using the ideas, words or data of others as if it is your own
- *Don't do it!!!*
- It is lying, cheating, stealing and conduct unbecoming an officer
- Grounds for dismissal—has happened
- But a paper full of others' citations is not a paper
- Check with instructor if unsure

HOW TO BEGIN

- **Check library and internet sources**
- **Select—**
 - **The newest**
 - **The author who has written the most on topic**
 - **What you think are best sources**
- **Check out or print no more than 6 total (books and articles)**
- **Use these before proceeding**
- **Use their bibliography and notes to continue**

SAVE EVERYTHING IN YOUR RESEARCH

- That crumpled note in the wastebasket might be just the insight you need
- Never write on both sides of a sheet of paper!
- Write down your thoughts as you proceed, not just those of others
- Key each bit of information, quotation, etc. to its source
 - Call # or website, author/title, p. #
 - Label and date all notes, each draft

CREATE A MASTER BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Keep a master list of all sources consulted
 - print
 - audio-visual
 - interviews
 - internet
- Annotate each source as to its value & focus
- State full bibliographic citation for all sources

THIS REALLY IS NOT THAT DIFFICULT

- **Begin--that's the hard part**
- **Keep focused**
- **Impose your will on the subject**
- **Persevere**
- **Get reinforcement from time to time**
- **Stay in touch with your advisor—
weekly**
- **WRITE!!!**

WRITING

“Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.”

Gene Fowler (1890 -
1960)

WRITING

- **It doesn't matter which part you start writing but start!**
- **It can be the beginning, the middle or the end (but they have to fit)**
- **Make yourself write some each day, if only a paragraph on some section of the paper**
- **Make sure you are following your outline of the topic**
- **Let it sit—read aloud—correct and rewrite**

PARTING SHOT

**“Unprovided with original learning,
uninformed in the habits of thinking,
unskilled in the arts of composition,
I resolved to write a book.”**

**Edward Gibbon, author
*Decline and Fall of the Roman
Empire***